

Darshan Vigneswaran

## *Territory, Migration and the Evolution of the International System*

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In his book *Territory, Migration and the Evolution of the International System* Darshan Vigneswaran offers a thought-provoking and innovative rereading of the history of international relations. Within a short 120 pages, Vigneswaran guides us from contemporary practices of immigration control back to Italian city-states, through British colonial rule in India, and finally returns our gaze to the modern project of the European Union and practices of migration control in post-apartheid South Africa. At the heart of Vigneswaran's argument are variations of what he designates as territorial strategies and their corresponding mental maps. Although Vigneswaran's book was published in 2013 it seems now even more relevant taking into account the "migration crisis" and its reflection in a more polarized Europe and last year's Brexit referendum. To grapple with these processes, we not only need policy proposals but a far richer understanding of migration and its interrelation to contemporary states in Europe that would point beyond the now common dichotomy of exclusionary fear-mongering advanced by the proponents of Fortress Europe or visions of a no-border world called upon by activists.

In the preface Vigneswaran familiarizes us with queue jumpers; they constitute a mental map, which is a simplified version of the reality of migration politics and practices on which a state relies to legitimize its authority over the labeled immigrants through using a shared image people have of waiting at a queue when crossing a border. Vigneswaran presents and analyzes the production of such mental maps, their relation to territorial strategies, and their importance for political communities in chapters that follow.

In Chapter One Vigneswaran introduces the basic concepts he will be using and further developing in his analysis and outlines his historical investigations. He claims that the troubling characteristic of the

contemporary international system is its inability to deal with migration. The fact that millions of people are being forced to live without a place in the world reflects the anachronism of the dominant system of territorial exclusion set up by nation-states to deal with migration. Vigneswaran claims that changing this predicament presupposes having a "conceptual vocabulary" for an alternative order (p. 3). It is to this conceptual vocabulary that Vigneswaran tries to contribute by investigating alternatives to territorial exclusion. These alternative territorial strategies can be found in history even today and they have arisen through thinking "about migration politics under fundamentally different conditions and constraints" (p. 4). Still, these discourses and territorial strategies were and are arising from the contemplations and actions of rulers and elites, whether those ruling city-states of Renaissance Italy or contemporary South Africa. Apart from exclusion, Vigneswaran identifies three other territorial strategies which are centralization, expansion and integration. Although others have discussed these strategies, where Vigneswaran sees that his contribution fills the gap is the presentation of the "crucial role that each strategy has played in the ongoing development of contemporary state, its spatial contours and migration policies" (p. 5).

In Chapter two Vigneswaran clarifies the concepts of political territoriality and mental maps. "Political territoriality is concerned with the organization and institutionalization of territorial behavior at a macro scale", Vigneswaran understands it as "powerful strategy" rulers employ and "that affect influence or control people, phenomena and relationships, by delimiting and asserting control over a geographic area" (p. 16). Territorial exclusion in the contemporary international system presupposes state sovereignty over migration governance, national citizenship as a criterion for inclusion and exclusion, and state borders that prevent entry for certain categories of migrants. The power of exclusion arises from the mutual reinforcement of these three elements. Vigneswaran claims that such an analysis helps seeing the inequality of phenomena through which this strategy is employed, as well as the agents that employ and reshape it. Vigneswaran defines mental maps as "cognitive images consisting of a series of shorthand descriptions that synthesize and summarize a vast array of complex geo-spatial processes into thematically organized and relatively stable understanding of space" (p. 20). Therefore, mental maps are essentially an interpretational tool of movement of people

through space and the justification for controlling that movement. They are essentially a description of places which present them as a locale, an identity and a location. These three elements interconnect through mental maps into "territorial strategizing"; locale as informing political control over space, identity informing the belonging of peoples within space into territory, and location informing the effectiveness of territorial control of migration.

In Chapter three Vigneswaran presents his historical investigation of centralization, an alternative territorial strategy that was developed in the city-states of Renaissance Italy. Vigneswaran uses the case of the banishment of Dante Alighieri and the existence of the towers of San Gimignano to explain the mental maps and the territorial strategy of these city states, as well as their difference to contemporary territorial strategies. Still, at first glance it seems that its strategy of banishment was also similar to that of exclusion of the modern state, but as Vigneswaran notes that was not reserved for the underprivileged equivalents of today's refugees and undocumented migrants. The city-states of the Renaissance were open; there were no border guards placed to do the excluding, still Italian city-states controlled the movement of people through "displacement of large portions of their most privileged classes from the capital, leaving them to wander abroad" (p. 30). This was because of a war fought inside the city states of which the towers of San Gimignano are remainders. It was fought between noble and affluent families each having control and power over individual compounds and the reason why the towers can be found in San Gimignano and not in other historical centers of former Italian city-states is because in these cities the territorial strategy of centralization was successful. The towers there were torn down by the centralized authority and the citizens after the nobility was forced out of the city or overpowered. Still, for this to happen Vigneswaran claims that two components of the new mental map informing the territorial strategy of centralization had to be developed. The first component is that of a captain of the people, who was appointed by the citizens to stop the feuds between the nobles and bring peace and stability to the city. The second was the development of civic pride which became the criterion for citizenship, and which largely influenced the development of "European ideas of statehood, belonging and movement" (p. 50). Vigneswaran stresses the need to revalue the legacy of the city state and

the strategy of territorial centralization in our contemporary era of global cities and more autonomous urban governance.

In Chapter 4 Vigneswaran turns to the territorial strategy of expansion exemplified by the colonial rule of the British Empire in India. Its mental map is presented through a trial of a governor general by Parliament for bad management and corruption of India. Vigneswaran uses this to criticize the standard of civilization thesis which claims that the British looked down upon India and its population. Vigneswaran claims that the standard only gradually emerged through the process of colonization itself. The territorial strategy of expansion employed by the British in India and elsewhere has been more informed by the crusades and the fact that they were “primarily concerned with expanding markets, rather than controlling jurisdictions” (p. 55). Vigneswaran states that for the British “India was not a backward place, but that India was endowed with vestige magnificence” (p. 63), and their mission was to enable India to regain its former glory. Still, as they saw most of British commoners corrupted, a strict immigration policy into India was enforced. This prevention of massive immigration would secure that through interaction with the best of Britain Indians would be morally reformed and not further corrupted. Vigneswaran claims that even later when more Europeans were needed to develop the Indian market and the British reached further with railroads, the Empire tried to contain interaction between colonizers and the locals through the construction of walled settlements called cantonments. Europeans were also arrested if they were found outside cantonments and could be even deported back to Europe.

Still, well into the 19th century most British citizens were subject to local rulers, only with the centralization of the Empire a transformation in British elites occurred which produced the standard of civilization argument. This argument was used to make claims for a direct rule of India, and Queen Victoria became its sovereign. Another important process was the introduction of meritocracy in the colonial bureaucracy which allowed Indians to attain higher positions and threatened the privilege of the British. To keep their position, the latter used the standard of civilization argument for the justification of racial inequality. This barred Indians entry to the highest positions and barred them from immigrating to the British Isles. Vigneswaran states that soon the increasingly independent dominions

like Australia and South Africa followed suit and used their newly gained autonomy for racially discriminatory citizenship and immigration laws. Vigneswaran argues that this historical investigation shows that there is not one dominant territorial strategy and alternatives that challenge it but that various strategies can complement and influence one another and be employed simultaneously.

In Chapter 5 Vigneswaran moves his analysis to the contemporary and still unfolding example of the new political space that is the European Union and the new territorial strategy of integration it employs. Although this strategy encompasses elements of previous strategies of centralization, expansion and exclusion; the borders of the European Union kept expanding till last year's Brexit referendum. There are discourses about the EU transforming into a "Fortress Europe", for Vigneswaran it is integration that is still at the center of the European project. Vigneswaran defines integration as a "political project focused on the control of populations through a specific means of designing, transforming and regulating space" (p. 82). Elements of this strategy can be detected in history in the symbols of the Roman Empire, the body of the feudal lord, or the trading networks of the Hanseatic League. Although the architects of the European Union were keen on political integration they saw economic integration via the common markets more suitable for a coming together of European states and for the prevention of anarchy and total war between them. As Vigneswaran states that "the purpose of the Community has always been through deepening the integration process by way of applying a broad interpretation of market principles into wider spheres of politics and society" (p. 89). Mediated by this economic integration, the migration regimes that developed in the European Union had the ideas of place and belonging at their core, and therefore entail a post-national idea of citizenship. Vigneswaran shows that this new kind of citizenship is embedded in a specific form of freedom of movement that presupposes "citizens from member states" to "establish themselves in the territory of any member state for the purpose of engaging in economic behavior" (p. 91). This emphatic relationship of the migrant to the space of his establishment was first the foundation of the European Union's negative principles of protection for migration groups and later gradually formed into positive principles which entailed voting rights in local elections.

Vigneswaran shows which groups have witnessed progressive excision from EU citizenship privileges; these are nationals of member states who pose potential risk, be it to public policy, security or health, and these persons can be deported like the known cases of deportation of Roma to their states of origin, in spite of human rights claims or asylum. The other group are third country nationals. There was never any intention "to extend the right of establishment to people who were not citizens of member states" (p. 94). This is why with the withering away of internal borders external borders remain so important, still according to Vigneswaran borders are not only technologies of exclusion. Border controls as elements of the strategy of integration are points through which disciplinary power is embracing and incorporating those groups of people that are viable to fit into the labor market and do not stretch the ever shrinking resources. This is why channeling migrant flows and sharing information within the EU is crucial and also why for the integration strategy the "undocumented migrant represents a threat to the very possibility of control" as he is not subject to these mechanisms (p. 102). Having presented this new territorial strategy Vigneswaran asserts that the next step for analysis is to contrast and compare the logic of integration with other kinds of territorial strategies to see the potentialities for change. These potentialities point beyond the binary discussions about fixed strategies or the dominance of one exclusionary strategy with aberrations.

In Chapter six Vigneswaran further elaborates how changes in the international system come about, and what the emergent or future form of that system might be. Based on explored examples which strengthen the claim that "variation is a normal feature of international politics" we should consider discarding "epochal models" (p. 105). Through exploring specific problems such as migration, scholars can more clearly see historical variations in international relations. Vigneswaran shows us this on the convergence of elements of different territorial strategies in informing current policies of migration. What we can see from the examples of Italian city states, the British Empire or the EU is that all these territorial strategies have been influences from prior and competing projects. Therefore, Vigneswaran states that "there has never been a period in which territorial exclusion dominated international politics without significant competition from an alternative form" (p. 107). Moreover, Vigneswaran claims that states using territorial exclusion actually allow far more mobility across

borders than they prevent. This prevention of certain categories of human mobility is informed by territorial design i.e. mental maps. These again arise from human interaction with the physical environment, producing locale, sense of place and location (p. 109). Vigneswaran asserts that the discipline of international relations is equipped to capture and explore these varieties as it has the potentiality to transcend methodological nationalism that might be plaguing other approaches. Still, for this the discipline needs the right conceptual cartography and Vigneswaran develops elements of this cartography in this book.

Vigneswaran ends his book with an epilogue, where he sketches practices and theories of territoriality from outside Europe, from the south. Drawing on the paths already taken by post-colonial theory, studies of governmentality and other theoretical inputs Vigneswaran analyses the examples of the mental map “from the South showing that they also contain elements of historical territorial strategies. More as a provocation for other authors Vigneswaran presents the analysis of yet another mental map at the heart of another potential territorial strategy, the calculative territorial strategy. He finds it in South Africa where we might be seeing the development of such a novel strategy making the country “one of the most prolific deporters of foreign nationals in the world” (p. 117). This is supported by the full use of mental maps and real crime maps informed by statistical and surveillance data (p. 118).

Vigneswaran stresses that we need to consider from which actors inputs for new territorial strategy are likely to emerge. He claims that as historical insight shows it is likely those that the current system is excluding, as they are the ones challenging it. Undocumented migrants as well as “the officials of developing and authoritarian states are the most likely to seek ways around the limits on state powers to control internal movement, exit and return” (p. 119).

Vigneswaran gives examples from China, Cuba and South Africa of what the elements are from this potentially new territorial strategy. Still, throughout the book Vigneswaran warns us that “we should always expect the old to appear in combination with the new, as rulers pick up on global trends and technologies and synthetically combine these practices with older traditions of spatial power and authority” (p. 119). Taking into

account the ongoing “migration crisis” in Europe this kind of analysis and research is more pertinent than ever, as we are seeing the formation of new mental maps such as “hot spots”, “asylum shoppers” and “disguised terrorists slipping through porous borders along with refugees”. We are yet to fully grasp the possibility of new territorial strategies these and other mental maps inform. Elements of these possible strategies reflected upon by Vigneswaran by taking note what was and is happening in South Africa and other places might form the vanguard of what could be seen in Europe in the years to come.

Vigneswaran's historical account pretty successfully challenges the notions of paradigm shifts in the history of the international system, as well as the traditional account of the rise of the modern states with the examples he gives on the evolution of political territoriality and interaction of territorial strategies, mental maps and the agents through which they arise. His insights are a provocation for other authors to further develop a proper conceptual vocabulary to which Vigneswaran's work is a great contribution. Therefore, international relation theorists, political scientists as well as historians should all be looking forward to Vigneswaran's further work dealing with contemporary territorial strategies in Africa, and contribute themselves to this conceptual vocabulary.

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